

By Rep. Sanford Bishop, Jr.
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The Governors of Georgia, Florida, and Alabama came to Washington last year optimistic that a fair and far-reaching solution could be worked out to bring an end to this “water war.” I, too, was hopeful.

But things have only gotten more complicated since October. A hastily adopted water plan passed by the Georgia General Assembly, a desperate attempt to move the Georgia border with Tennessee up to the 35th parallel, secretive negotiations between the governors, a persistent, damaging drought, and pending litigation between the states all have stood in the way of progress.

There are several “fronts” in this water war. And on every front, a common tactic is being employed: unwillingness to compromise.

In the past 15 years, the sixteen county metro Atlanta area has gained a warranted national reputation for its uncontrollable growth. Suburban sprawl, crippling pollution, and 24-hour traffic jams are just some of the ways it has proven unable to live within its means.

Of course, the metro Atlanta area serves as a great economic boon for the state and indeed the region. I am proud to live in a state with a thriving capital city. However, they could be more prudent in their water use and conservation.

But it's not just Atlanta. We've heard differing accounts of how much water nuclear power plants need to operate, how much water flow mussels and sturgeon need to survive, how much Alabama needs, how much Florida needs.

I do not understand how a long-term plan can be arranged and sustainability can be achieved unless all the interest groups engage in a frank and honest conversation, and give some ground on just how much water they need to survive.

Recently, the water war drew in the Congressional representatives of the water-war states. It brings me no pleasure to serve as one of the mediators. I am hopeful, though, that Congressional involvement will help bring all the stakeholders toward a more open, honest process.

As the Congressman who represents Southwest Georgia, I will do my dead level best to protect Southwest Georgia interests. But the bottom line for a resolution of this water war is that fairness, for all of the various watersheds, must be achieved.

I believe that we, on the southern end of the state, have tried over the past decade to be wise stewards of our water. We have poured millions of dollars into research so that we can get the most efficient agricultural production with the least water utilization, in an effort to conserve this life sustaining resource and preserve it for those downstream, and for the future.

I expect the same of our louder and greedier upstream neighbors. If this means those upstream have to plan better in their growth, then so be it.

I will not let downstream Georgia communities, from West Point Lake to Lake Seminole, have their needs trampled without due consideration in a stampede to protect unrestricted and unplanned growth in water use in the northern part of the state.